

PRESS RELEASE FROM
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Bipartisan Reform Effort Continues to Make Progress

Legislature Taking Back Government from Special Interests

HAUPPAUGE, NY, JUNE 24, 2010 – The Suffolk County Legislature Tuesday night adopted two more planks of a seven-part bipartisan reform effort announced at the end of April in the continuing effort to take back control of county government from special interests and return it to the people.

The two bills adopted Tuesday were reform to the county Ethics Commission, strengthening its independence by providing independent counsel, and changes to the way the county contracts for title work, eliminating any chance of favoritism by requiring a rotating pool of 10 or more companies.

In the wake of the uproar over revelations about contracting practices in Suffolk County, Legislature Presiding Officer William J. Lindsay (D-Holbrook) was joined by a bipartisan group of County Legislators at the Legislature's meeting April 27 in Riverhead in pushing for wide-ranging changes in the way county government operates that will take back control of government from special interests.

"I am heartened to see the Legislature continue to take swift and decisive action to clean up the way Suffolk County government does business," said Presiding Officer Lindsay. "Special interest groups have unfortunately had far too much influence over county government and we in the County Legislature will continue to fight for the reforms that will put government back where it belongs—in the hands of the people."

The ethics board reforms were sponsored by Legislator Ricardo Montano (D-Brentwood) and create additional independence for the Ethics Commission by allowing it to hire independent counsel for ethics issues instead of relying on the County Attorney's office, as it does now.

"We can't have the independence of an Ethics Board ever put in doubt, and the independent counsel will ensure that," said Legislator Montano.

Also on Tuesday night, Presiding Officer Lindsay announced that he is forming a special legislative committee to determine exactly what the Ethics Commission does and how it does it.

"I hope that this legislative committee can restore confidence in the Ethics Commission by making clear what it is the Ethics Commission does and making any

recommendations necessary to change the way the Commission operates to make sure the Commission is absolutely beyond reproach,” said Presiding Officer Lindsay.

The title insurance law (IR 1412) was sponsored by County Legislator John M. Kennedy Jr. (R-Nesconset) and is a sweeping reform of the scandal-ridden title insurance procedures of Suffolk County that creates a pool of more than 10 qualified title insurance companies and requires the county to rotate through the pool for all title insurance work.

“We cannot allow even the appearance that county government is up for grabs to the highest bidder,” said Legislator Kennedy. “This will reestablish trust in the fair operation of county government.”

Three of the other bills in the reform package have already been adopted, including:

--Legislation to improve oversight of the hiring of outside counsel sponsored by Presiding Officer William J. Lindsay. The resolution requires that all proposals to hire outside counsel to provide legal services totaling more than \$25,000 without the issuance of a RFP must go before the RFP waiver committee. “Contracts for outside counsel used go to whichever law firm is most favored at the time,” said Lindsay.

--Legislator DuWayne Gregory’s (D-Amityville) prompt contracting proposal requires that contracts with not-for-profit organizations are paid in a timely manner. “The County makes sure to pay its for-profit contractors as soon as they get the vouchers,” said Legislator Gregory. “The least we can do for the hard-pressed not-for-profit groups doing good work for the County is to pay them as quickly as pay campaign contributors of the County Executive.”

--Legislator Gregory also sponsored the prompt contracting bill (IR 1415) which reforms the way the county issues contracts. “This bill goes hand in hand with the prompt payment bill, because without a contract payment can not be provided to a contracted agency,” said Legislator Gregory.

The last two bills in the reform package are still before the Ways and Means Committee. One bill would increase legislative oversight of the RFP process, and was sponsored by Legislator Edward P. Romaine (R-Center Moriches). It would require that all county contracts in excess of \$50,000 be approved by the County Legislature. “The RFP process has at times been used to circumvent usual budget practices and that has to end,” said Legislator Romaine.

Legislator Montano also sponsored legislation that would require that every member of the County Legislature be notified within 15 days of the hiring of any consultant by any county department. “This law will help in the effort to ensure the public can rely on the fact that county consultants are being hired solely based on merit and not on favoritism or political consideration,” said Legislator Montano.